

# Saint Paul's Melanie Huggins Named RCPL Executive Director

Contributed by Curtis Rogers  
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Melanie Huggins has been named executive director of the Richland County Public Library, replacing David Warren who retired April 3 after nearly 30 years. Huggins comes to RCPL from Saint Paul, Minnesota, where she has served as director of the Saint Paul Public Library for three years.

While at Saint Paul, a system similar in size and usage to RCPL, Huggins has worked to increase partnerships with the business and cultural communities. She implemented an award-winning awareness campaign, Saint Paulitics, to educate and engage citizens in the democratic process that coincided with the city hosting the Republican National Convention.

Huggins's other accomplishments at Saint Paul include:

- Increasing attendance at programs and events by more than 70 percent in three years;
- Increasing the library's open hours to the highest in library history;
- Creating the library's first Leadership Academy to develop leadership skills throughout the organization; and
- Positioning the library as a champion in the areas of early literacy, workforce development and college access.

Previously, Huggins worked at the Public Library of Charlotte & Mecklenburg County for nearly 10 years, working in children's services for four years until she was promoted to director of Youth and Outreach Services.

While in Charlotte, Huggins successfully combined her love of the arts, passion for encouraging creativity in young people, and belief in the strength of partnerships by developing several nationally acclaimed library projects including: "Smart Connections" — a cultural partnership with the library supporting local arts organizations and "Continue the Contact" — a partnership with the Department of Social Services that gives backpacks of books and art supplies to youth going into foster care. She also led the development of ImaginOn: The Joe and Joan Martin Center, a partnership and joint use facility with the Children's Theatre of Charlotte that opened in October of 2005.

"With David Warren's departure, we had big shoes to fill," said Rox Pollard, chair of the RCPL Board of Trustees. "Mr. Warren transformed an underfunded library system into a National Library of the Year. We need someone with the vision, energy and ability to continue that momentum and ensure that the services and programs our community receives remain world class. Melanie Huggins has proven she can do just that."

Since 2004, Huggins has also worked as a consultant with Providence Associates, creating the "Bringing the Plan to Life" strategic plan implementation workshop, developing a 25 year Master Facilities and Service Plan for the State Library of Delaware, and assisting with the Saint Paul Public Library's strategic planning process before becoming director.

A noted expert in the areas of strategic planning, collaborations, leadership development and library staffing, Huggins is a frequent speaker and facilitator for other libraries and organizations. Currently, she is the chair of the Forecasting Strategy Group for Urban Libraries Council and is active with the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the American Library Association.

Huggins earned a bachelor's degree in fine arts from Winthrop University and her master's in library science from the University of South Carolina. She worked as a library assistant in the Children's Room of the Main Library before returning to school to earn her master's degree. While at USC, she worked as a graduate and library assistant at RCPL.

"Returning to RCPL, the library where I started my career, is a wonderful feeling," said Huggins. "It's where I was introduced to the work that I'm so passionate about. I look forward to the opportunity to serve not only the library but my hometown of Columbia and the residents of Richland County."

Huggins will begin at RCPL in July. Until then, RCPL's Deputy Director for Youth and Support Services Helen Ann Rawlinson will serve as Acting Director.

Last year, RCPL attracted 2.1 million visitors to its 11 locations, and circulation was more than 3.3 million. In addition to being named the National Library of the Year in 2001, RCPL has also received state and national attention for its special services, including a Literary Residency program and its significant contributions to the arts and humanities in South

Carolina.